EXTREMISM

# Reflecting on Two Months of War Against Hamas

**HAMAS** | December 7, 2023 | Josh Lipowsky — CEP Senior Research Analyst

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December 7 marks exactly two months since Hamas's vicious surprise assault on Israel, when it massacred at least 1,200 and took more than 240 hostage into Gaza. While Hamas released around 100 hostages during a weeklong ceasefire in November, the terrorist group violated the ceasefire and plunged Gaza and Israel back into war. As of now, Hamas still holds at least 130 abductees.

The freed captives have described horrible conditions and treatment, dispelling Hamas's attempted narrative that the hostages were treated well as guests. They have described being subjected to beatings, severely limited food rations, and psychological torture. Hamas has, of course, not allowed the Red Cross to visit the hostages, adding to the list of its war crimes.

As Israel continues its mission to uproot Hamas's infrastructure in Gaza, international cries for a ceasefire are growing. But it is necessary to question what a ceasefire would actually mean. And the sad conclusion is: not much. Hamas and Israel agreed to a ceasefire in May 2021 to end 11 days of fighting that began with a Hamas rocket attack. That ceasefire remained in place up until October 6. Hamas broke it on October 7 with its devastating attack.

Similarly, Israel and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) agreed to a ceasefire on May 14, 2023, after five days of fighting. That

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did not stop PIJ from participating in the October 7 attack. Last month, Hamas and Israel agreed to a temporary ceasefire that began on November 24. Israel agreed to halt its assault on Gaza and release 150 Palestinian security prisoners from Israeli jails in exchange for 50 hostages. After the four-day ceasefire ended, Israel agreed to extend it one day for every 10 hostages Hamas freed.

Then, on November 30, while the ceasefire was in place, a Hamas gunman killed three people and wounded two others in Jerusalem. Hamas praised the attack as a “direct response to the unprecedented crimes committed by the occupying forces…” and pledged attacks would continue in “every city, village, street and alley.” On December 1, Hamas restarted its rocket launches from Gaza. Further, Hamas has openly admitted that while it was maintaining its previous ceasefire with Israel, it was also preparing for the October 7 massacre for years, going as far as to build mock Israeli towns in Gaza in which to practice raids. Hamas, PIJ, and other terrorist groups had been drilling for this attack since at least 2020. According to one Hamas statement, the drills were to “simulate the liberation of settlements near Gaza,” referring to Israeli communities near the border. These are not the actions of a party interested in a ceasefire or trustworthy enough to uphold one.

Since its founding in the 1980s, Hamas has been clear that it wants Israel’s destruction. And the basis for that desire is that Israel is a Jewish nation. Hamas’s charter is filled with antisemitic imagery. In later years, Hamas has denied the

antisemitic roots in their ideology, but Hamas ideologues have preached for decades that the core of the problem is, in fact, the Jews.

Hamas rockets have targeted Israeli civilians across the country, sending civilians running to bomb shelters. Two months into the battle and Gaza is in ruins but Hamas remains. Thousands of Palestinians are dead and thousands more have been displaced. Rebuilding Gaza will take years and people who were already living in poor conditions will be relegated to temporary refugee tents. And yet, while Gaza is running out of food, water, and medicine, the one commodity the territory seems to have in abundance is rockets—a testament to Hamas's theft of resources from the Palestinian people. Last month, Hamas's deputy Gaza leader, Khalil al-Hayya, openly admitted that Hamas did not seek to "run Gaza and to bring it water and electricity" or "to improve the situation in Gaza," but to "completely overthrow the situation."

Hamas has been singularly focused on its goal to eradicate Israel, willing to sacrifice ordinary Palestinians who want to live in peace and raise their families. This is the legacy of October 7. And this is the devastation for which Hamas is responsible. The two-month anniversary of the October 7 barbarity, finally, coincides with the first night of Chanukah, which commemorates a military victory of the Maccabees over the Greek Seleucids who wanted the Jews to Hellenize and abandon their Judaism. Like their Maccabee ancestors, modern Israel has found itself in a battle against those who want to erase its identity.

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